# A JOURNEY IN HADRAMAUT

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101 Hadramaut is a part of Arabia about which very little is yet known. It was celebrated in antiquity as the land of frankincense and myrrh, and the great trade route from India to the ports of South Arabia and thence through Hadramaut, Yemen and Nejran to Egypt and Syria, brought prosperity and culture. Lying on the border of the Sabæan and Minæan kingdoms, Hadramaut appears to have adopted many of their civilizing elements, and yet to have maintained its own independence. After the decline of the Sabæan kingdom and the civilization which flourished there, Hadramaut also sank into poverty and ignorance. In this respect Islam appears to have brought but little change. After the destruction of 167 the irrigation works, the poverty became terrible, and 735 the country was scarcely able to provide a meagre subsistence even for a very small population. Even centuries ago this led the most enterprising of the men to seek for themselves a better livelihood in foreign lands. 167 The men of Hadramaut wandered off to the east coast 186 of Africa, to the countries around the Red Sea as far as Egypt, to British India and to the Dutch East Indies. Their women never went with them, and the men remained firmly attached to their poor, dry and intensely hot native land. In foreign lands the people of Hadramaut have preserved their own characteristics up to the present day, and have never become assimilated to the peoples among whom they lived, endeavoring to return at some time to their native land, and sending their male children to Hadramaut for their education, if they could

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afford to do so. It is difficult to understand what it is that binds them so firmly to their poor, monotonous and scorching rocks and deserts. Their fanatical Mohammedanism is certainly an important factor, but so is also their love for their ill-favored country, and the intuitive perception that the preservation of their group and of its characteristic attributes is closely connected with the hard, frugal and primitive ways of living in their native land.

In those regions to which the people of Hadramaut emigrate they usually have a much larger part in the economic life of the people than their numbers would justify. This is particularly the case in the Dutch East Indies, where they have an increasingly important place as business men and as owners of land and houses, as well as being students of religion and promoters of orthodox Islam.

It was very natural that about the year 1880 the government of the Netherlands Indies recommended the agent for Arabian and Mohammedan affairs to make a special study of Hadramaut and of the people who had come from that part of Arabia to the East Indies. The book written by this officer, Dr. L. W. C. van den Berg, "Le Hadhramaut et les Colonies Arabes dans l'Archipel Indien," was published in 1886 at government expense. This year the Department for Foreign Affairs urged its representative at Jeddah to attempt a journey in Hadramaut for a diplomatic and economic survey. This preliminary report is the result of that request.

Dr. van den Berg wrote his book in Batavia, and never went to Hadramaut, but he got his information with the help of intelligent men from Hadramaut with whom he had intimate connections. He even made a sketch-map of the country, which was printed with his book, and for this the information these men supplied was of course indispensable. This sketch-map of course had many defects, but Hadramaut has been visited so little by scientific explorers that even this year van den

114 Berg's book written in 1886 was recommended to me by the governor of Aden as the best source of information they had at the government office at Aden. I also found that at that time the Royal Air Force was making use of Van den Berg's sketch-map in the scouting flights which they made over Hadramaut, and had corrected but few serious faults in it.

114 484 The attention of travelers in Arabia has been directed chiefly to the Hejaz and to what is known as Arabia Felix (Yemen), the center of civilization in former times. For this reason Hadramaut has been somewhat neglected, and also because it was so difficult to get into the interior. This was a closed land, not only for Christians but for strangers in general. The first explorer of Hadramaut was Adolph von Wrede, who made his memorable journey in 1843, disguised as an Egyptian Moslem. He was able to penetrate only as far as the entrance to Hadramaut itself, but he brought back with him very valuable material in regard to the region between the shore of the Indian Ocean and the actual valley of Hadramaut. However, in his native land (Germany) he was considered as an impostor, and it was not until 1873 that his "Reise in Hadhramaut" was published by von Maltzan.

It was not until January, 1893, that a second traveler attempted to follow the illustrious example of von Wrede. After months of futile efforts and journeys along the coast, it was Leo Hirsch's good fortune to get into the country and to penetrate to the interior. He reached the town of Terīm, but had to leave that place immediately, owing to the threats of the Sayyids and the populace. In 1897 he published his very accurate reports on his journey.

Shortly after Hirsch, in December, 1893, an English married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Bent, tried to visit the Hadramaut valley. They did not get as far as Hirsch, and had to turn back from Shibām. The Hadramaut sanctuary of the tomb of the prophet Hūd, and the mysterious well, Bīr Barhūt, would continue for

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some decades longer to be exempt from the visit of a Christian.

This ends the list of the explorers of Hadramaut. The Royal Air Force did indeed make several scouting flights from Aden over Hadramaut, but they never made a landing, and sometimes had to fly very high. To these flights, however, we are indebted for a very important series of photographs, which provide valuable geographical material (see *The Geographical Journal,* vol. lxxvii, No. 3, March, 1931).

When I was given the task of visiting this country, which is so little known, and so important to us (Hollanders) in view of the tens of thousands of people from Hadramaut who live in the Netherlands Indies, I took steps to make more of the journey than could be accomplished by one government official who is not in any way an expert. I sent an invitation to Dr. H. von Wissmann of the Geographical Institute connected with the University of Vienna, asking him to venture with me upon the hazardous journey to Hadramaut. I had become acquainted with von Wissmann through his exploration work in the Hejaz and Yemen. He was to make the survey of the journey, and to carry out all instrumental and scientific observations, and we would work together on the collections of plants and insects and in taking photographs. Moreover I was able to offer him the assistance of an official introduction from the Dutch government, my knowledge of the Arabic and Malay languages, and that special help which a former government official from the Dutch Indies might hope for in the country of the Hadramaut people.

When I met von Wissmann at Aden in April of this year (1931), I had just completed a trip along the shores of the Red Sea. Both of us had received very unfavorable information in regard to present conditions in Hadramaut. Practically no one gave us any hope of success. However, the English authorities at Aden

thought that we had some slight chance of succeeding, and they gave us loyal cooperation.

Thus we landed at Makalla on Sunday, May 3, accompanied only by my Yemenite servant. The Sultan was away as usual, and his vizier read the letters of introduction from our minister of foreign affairs and from the Governor of Aden. We were very well accommodated in one of the Sultan's former palaces, and then began the task of waiting for the great decision as to whether we might enter the country. The same evening we had the good fortune to meet a member of the family al-'Attās, which is very friendly with the government of the Dutch Indies. He had received a telegram from his father instructing him to give all possible help to the Dutch representative of the government in his anticipated journey in Hadramaut. The Sayyid family of al-'Attās, together with the closely allied family of al-Kāf, belongs to the leading group in Hadramaut proper. Two great parties, which are hostile to one another, are contesting for the power in this country, namely, the āl-Qa'ētī, who have their headquarters at Makalla, and the āl-Kathīr, with headquarters at Sēwun. The āl-Qa'ētī sultans take their cue from the English, and, thanks to English help, have authority in the coast region. The āl-Kathīr are more independent, and reside in Hadramaut proper, that is, in the broad valley in the interior which has that name. The Sayyids boast of being directly descended from the son-in-law of the Prophet, and in Hadramaut society hold a distinct and very privileged position. They have great influence with the government, but leave the actual business for the most part to the non-sayyids. The immediate and whole-hearted support of the al-'Attās certainly did our enterprise a great deal of good, for on the following day we received the promise that we might go inland. However, the great difficulties of the journey, especially at this time of the year (one of the hottest months), were expressly pointed out to us; and we were urgently dissuaded from crossing the

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boundary of the region of the āl-Qa'ētī, and were advised to trust to the āl-Kathīr. About five days were considered necessary to get our caravan together, and these days were made use of for making a botanical collection on the limestone hills behind Makalla.

Von Wissmann made profile sketches of the hills, and made observations to get a good base for his road survey. We were thankful to make use of the permission granted us by the authorities to make a trip for two days along the coast to ash-Shihr, which was formerly the most important harbor. Even a short distance inland from Makalla the country becomes unsafe. We were taken in a sort of auto-bus belonging to the sultan round the inland side of the mass of rock at Makalla, after that close along the shore, and finally even along the flat sandy shore. The bus was quite full of armed guards. We were forbidden to go by the road over the mountains, since on that road some soldiers had been killed from an ambush a short time before.

We were thankful when, after many negotiations with the leaders of our caravan, the signal for departure could be given on the afternoon of May 8. From early morning until the afternoon the vizier had had to negotiate with a group of Bedouins, who were waiting for our caravan among the rocks near the road, just outside the whitewashed boundary marks of the town of Makalla, in order to satisfy a blood-feud. The vizier knew how to bargain for a safe passage, but to be quite safe he had us taken in a government auto to a point beyond the border. In the darkness of night we were set down by the side of the road to wait for our donkeys!

The journey to the inaccessible and fanatical land of Hadramaut was now begun. From the 9th to the 15th of May we traveled northwards,—first through the Wādī Himim. Finally we came to the terrible, monotonous plateau with table-mountains, known as *jōl*. For many days we marched over this limestone plateau with its basin-like depressions and its very scant vegetation.

During the daytime the heat was stifling, and at night it was so cold that for hours before the sun rose I was no longer able to sleep. The interminable, barren plain was covered all over with sharp, loose fragments of stone, and among these wound the narrow path along which from morning to night we steadily wended our way. Drinking water is here to be found in *negābas,* which are cisterns hewn out of the rock some three meters below the surface, with a narrow opening. Low ridges lead the scanty rainfall to the *negāba.* Owing to the narrow opening there is very little evaporation, and if one has no rope at hand with a vessel to draw water, this opening is just large enough to admit a man to dip it out. Near the *negāba* there is usually a little square building made by piling up rough stones in clay, this is called *murabba,* and here the midday hours with their scorching heat may be spent. For the sake of safety, our Bedouins avoided the *negābas* as places for passing the night. In the evening the neighborhood of the bivouac was carefully reconnoitred, and usually sentries were posted at night. The authorities at Makalla had given us for our personal protection two negro soldiers belonging to the famous slave army of the āl-Qa'ētī sultan. On May 15 we reached the wonderfully beautiful valley Wādī Dō'an. The descent of hundreds of meters of this almost perpendicular wall of rock with loaded camels was a difficult feat causing some anxiety; but the Bedouins and their camels reached the valley below without a single mishap. As we looked upon this *wādī,* hemmed in by its high walls of rock, it looked like a land of magic with its deep-green groves of date palms and its clay villages with great castles and high houses. [A glowing heat as dry as dust prevailed in Wādī Dō'an night and day. The bright yellow and deep red bunches of dates were hanging ripening in the hot wind. In the shade of the magnificent and remarkably well kept trees the population were quietly waiting for the harvest time. A great deal of mixture with negro blood (of slaves) has

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taken place here, and there are still many slaves for agricultural work.

The old blind governor, Bā Surra, received us in his castle with oriental hospitality. The only thing we had to complain of in our lodgings was that there were too many interested in us! Our animals for mountain transport had to be exchanged here for others which were accustomed to traveling in the hot sand of the level *wādis*.

On the 17th of May we resumed our journey, after having been entertained first in the summer residence of the vizier of Makalla, where his son acted as host. As the evening shadows fell we reached Sēf, a miserable and squalid village where nearly a century ago von Wrede was recognized as a Christian, and barely escaped a miserable death. We also had unpleasant experiences at Sēf. Long before Sēf the *wādī* had lost its splendid datepalm cultivation, and had become a broad valley of sand and stones, with here and there some lotus trees (*nibq*). After the excellent reception we had had at Dō'an, Sēf was a grievous disappointment. The governor was supposed to be away, but it appeared later that because of his embarrassment and poverty he had sought an excuse to be relieved of the duty of conferring hospitality upon us. In a very primitive manner we were installed upon the roof of a stable by the governor's soldiers, who took his place as our hosts. We were not left alone for a moment, for interested visitors were continually jostling one another on our roof. We had to secure fresh donkeys at Sēf, and the troublesome negotiations about this began that evening.

The next day the governor appeared, but he seemed to have absolutely no influence. We had to wait for hours before the necessary donkeys and camels were brought. A large escort of soldiers eager for *baksheesh* wished to accompany us, but I vigorously opposed this, and succeeded in reducing their number to two. Much too late, weary of all the negotiations and disgusted with the obvious opposition and antipathy of everybody here

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against the two non-Moslem travelers, we started in the direction of Hajarēn. It was a silent struggle against thirst and heat. At last we were standing at the foot of the mountain on which Hajarēn lies. It must be a very old town. For a land of warfare its position is also very favorable. In the midst of the broad valley, on the top of a steep rocky hill, which stands there alone and commands the entire valley, they naturally preferred to build a town in former times. We were at the end of our strength as we worked our way up, in through the gate of Hajarēn, and by many narrow, steep streets to a plain house where a friend of the Dutch was said to be living. He might well have been startled when he saw the caravan of his unexpected visitors. It was a long time before the doors were opened. Luck was not with us. A double wedding feast was just being celebrated, and the women had to vacate the room in which we were to be received. Our host was not rich, but he put himself and all that he had at our disposal. When he saw how weary we were and how we longed for rest, a room was made ready for us higher up, where we could sleep until the meal was ready. We were under the roof of a Dutch subject. I remember with deep gratitude the oriental hospitality which cannot be praised enough, and of which we saw here a brilliant example. Thoroughly refreshed we started in the afternoon for Meshed. We had to close our ranks in doing this, for here was the neutral zone between the regions of the āl-Qa'ētī and the āl-Kathīr. Everything here indicated warfare and highway robbery. Meshed is a little place built in the midst of the desert, solely for the purpose of preventing highway robbery. The trade route from the Wādī Hadramaut through the Wādī Dō'an to the coast is safe since Meshed was established. Here we came into the jurisdiction of the family al-'Attās, and our troubles and anxieties came to an end. We were taken into a beautiful, spotlessly clean guest house, and were welcomed as honored guests by the cultured son of the absent governor.

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On the 19th of May we reached Horēda, the tribal village of the family al-'Attās, where we had a fine reception. Horēda can thank the wealth accumulated in Java and at Singapore for its beautiful houses and mosques. There is a large number of Dutch subjects there, and so many of them speak Malay that one even frequently hears it spoken on the streets.

On the 20th and 21st of May we remained at Horēda. The mosques and schools were carefully examined, and some short excursions were made in that neighborhood.

Horēda lies in the Wādī 'Amd, which branches off from the main *Wādī* of Hadramaut, to which we now returned, leaving Horēda on the 22nd of May. Bin Marta' from Soerabaya, a large dealer in building materials, took us in his auto, which was the first that ever came to Horēda, to the place where he lives, Hēnan. It was a difficult task among the endless sand-hills to find a track on which it was possible for the auto to travel, and when a sandstorm came up we had to flee to the Diyār-āl-Buqri, certain high castles in the midst of the broad sandy *wādī*, which were the center of a warfare which had been going on there for years. The fighting captains and their soldiers received us very well; they appear to have close family relationships with Java. Elsewhere, in a description of the political situation, I will deal minutely with the Diyār-āl-Buqri and their inhabitants. Hēnan is a little place which is lost in the sand. By installing a motor pump, our friend Bin Marta' is trying to arouse his village to new life.

On the 23rd of May, Bin Marta' took us in his auto to al-Qatn, the residence of the sultan of Shibām. We were here once more in the āl-Qa'ētī jurisdiction. At al-Qatn the Wādī Hadramaut changes completely, and beautiful date-palm plantations begin here. In the shadow of these palms lie the luxurious green *dhura* fields (maize). The sultan did not appear to be at al-Qatn, and we were received by a member of the family. Through a severe sandstorm we drove on to Shibām, the

361 609 New York of Hadramaut. The city consists of very high houses built close together. One drives into the city through a heavy double gate, and then up a square in front of the ancient but beautiful palace, which is at the same time a castle. The young and sympathetic sultan received us cordially, but was very much displeased about our guides of the al-'Attās, who had not taken care that His Highness was properly informed beforehand about our coming. The situation was relieved by some rich merchants of Singapore with an invitation for us to take an auto ride to their plantations, and by their asking the sultan's permission to invite us to stay at the house in their plantation. This the sultan permitted, on condition that we should first take a meal with him, and that on the way back we should make it possible for him to prepare a worthy reception for us. The gentlemen at at-Tuwayy and La'jam had a house like a fairy tale, where we afterwards stayed in the atmosphere of the 000 Arabian nights. In front of this house, which was decorated in fantastic colors, there was a small swimming pool, and here in the soft moonlight we forgot all about the sandstorm.

We spent the morning of the 24th of May with our hosts and the sultan at the house in the plantation, and at midday we went further on to Sēwun in the sultan's automobiles. There they had been properly informed as to our coming. The sultan, surrounded by all his retinue, was awaiting us in a white guesthouse, situated in the plantation quarter. In this little town, which is the most beautiful in Hadramaut, we spent several interesting days. The sultan of Terīm also has his palace at Sēwun, and is generally at the last-named place, since at Terīm Sayyid Abu Bakr Al Kāf is the dominant person. In his palace we spent one forenoon.

491 On May the 26th we went in two of the sultan's automobiles to Terīm. At the express desire of His Highness we drove along the mountain road, which was constructed by Sayyid Abu Bakr Al Kāf, and the entire

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cost was paid by him. The way across the mountains is fantastically dangerous, but an expert chauffeur with a first class auto seems to be able to pass over it without any accident. I made up my mind, however, not to risk it again, and on the way back to follow the longer way round through the *wādī*. The mountain road was constructed at a time when it was impossible, owing to hostilities, to pass through the level country.

From the 27th of May until the 7th of June we were in Terīm as the guests of Sayyid Abu Bakr Al Kāf. As a Sayyid he has no official part in the government of his country, but actually he is the man who is now doing most for his country and people. It was he who founded the schools at Makalla, at ash-Shihr, at Dō'an and in the towns of the Wādī Hadramaut, and it is he who supports them; it was he who made possible the transport of the first automobiles from the coast to Terīm, along the great road which he is now engaged in constructing. He is the man who constructed the automobile road from Terīm to Sēwun, and it is he who gives generously to thousands of the poor, to whom he has food supplied every Thursday evening. Terīm is the town for religion and learning; once it was the most important town of Hadramaut, and it is again on the road to become that. It is a town with a multitude of mosques and dozens of palaces, in which are living those families the members of which were able to amass millions of money in Java and at Singapore. The home of Sayyid Abu Bakr is the place where religious and political leaders meet one another, and where the future of the country is discussed.

Thanks to the help of our host, we were able to make a trip to Sūne, the center for archæology, and finally to attain our most distant goal by being able to visit the central sanctuary of Hadramaut, namely, the grave of the prophet of Allah, Hūd, and to explore the mythical abode of the souls of the unbelievers, Bīr Barhūt. The tomb of Hūd (Qabr Hūd) is the Mecca of Hadramaut and of the surrounding countries. For three days in

every year pilgrims assemble there from all those regions, and both before and after that a Truce of God prevails during an appointed period, in this country which is rent asunder by mutual warfare. Never before had a Christian been able to get further than Terīm in the direction of this sanctuary, and without the protection and the planning of the powerful Sayyid Abu Bakr Al Kāf we should not have succeeded. On the way to Qabr Hūd we passed the magnificent ruined castles of el-'Urr and Thōbe, and the remains of houses and a cemetery at Makēnun. Qabr Hūd seemed to be a silent and defunct little town, with great houses which are only occupied for three days in a year. In the bed of the *wādī* there appeared to be water here, but before it reaches the sea it is said to disappear underground or else to dry up. The grave of Hūd, the great preacher of repentance in Hadramaut, is adorned with a dome which impresses one by its simplicity and beauty. The other sacred buildings are equally beautiful and are well kept. Where we had expected to find a Bedouin sanctuary which was neglected and primitive and surrounded by mud huts for the pilgrims, we found instead on the border of Arabia's "empty quarter," far away from the world, a sanctuary built and cared for with devotion and great talent.

We entered still further into the branch valley of Barhūt, and at the end of this *wādī* we saw at a height of about one hundred meters above the bottom of the valley the dark yawning chasm of the Bīr Barhūt, of which even the ancient geographers furnished descriptions, and definitely anticipated that there must be here the crater of a great volcano. After an investigation of two hours in the dark passages, arches and tunnels of Bīr Barhūt we were able to determine that we have here to deal with an ordinary limestone cave. Nowhere in this region did we see any trace of volcanic action. It was only in the broken ridge of mountains on the coast that we saw many traces of volcanic action. Further north the strata are horizontal; a layer of limestone about

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a hundred meters in thickness lies on a likewise horizontal layer of sandstone. Owing to this, the valley profiles throughout Hadramaut are monotonously uniform.

On the 7th of June we left Terīm. With some difficulty we had succeeded in securing the sympathy and cooperation of Sayyid Abu Bakr for our plan of trying to reach Aden overland. The baggage would be sent direct to ash-Shihr, and thence by sea to Aden. We could take with us only as much as we could carry with us on our riding camels. With a small escort and fast camels we should then perhaps be able to pass unnoticed through the region where there was war. This plan fell through. We were continually coming upon territory through which we could not pass. By way of Horēda we passed through the Wādī 'Amd to a place where, beyond 'Amd, the territory between two contending parties compelled us to make a circuitous movement through the country of the Deyyin Bedouins. Even though we traveled rapidly with a small party we were continually compelled to make new detours. In so doing we got still further away from our original goal, namely, Nisāb (or Ansāb), which is the furthest English outpost in the hinterland of Aden. At Yeb'ith, where the attitude of the population was antagonistic, and where our food supply seemed to be extremely limited, we gave up the Aden plan, and decided to make rapid marches direct to Makalla. At Sidāra we entered the Wādī Hajr, the only *wādī* in South Arabia where there is always running water. At Mēfa'a we reached the coast. Through the difficult mountain range along the coast we went as far as the fishing town of Borūm. Then we followed the coast to Makalla, where we arrived safe on the afternoon of June 21.

The return journey had been partly through territory never yet traveled. Von Wissmann was thus in a position to put on his map the exact connection between Hadramaut and the hinterland of Aden. By this conclusion of

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our journey we obtained a more correct view of the political condition of the interior of the country, and of the destitution into which the mutual hostilities have brought the population. For hours we had to walk through the trenches from one beleaguered city to another, and were able to speak with the invested garrisons; their longing for the intervention of some powerful outsider was frequently expressed by the leaders. Von Wissmann's maps, the full report of our journeys, some English air photographs and many of our own pictures of the hitherto so little known Hadramaut, will, we trust, soon be published, thanks to the assistance of the Royal Geographical Society of the Netherlands.

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